

VALLETTA: A city in history

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Sociologist Richard Sennett sets the theme of his book *Flesh and Stone* in the first sentence of this text, namely, that it "is a history of the city told through people's bodily experience: how women and men moved, ... saw, ... heard, ... smelled, ... ate, ... dressed, ... bathed, ... made love in cities from ancient Athens to modern New York".³ He holds that the turning point in the interest and treatment of the body and its relation to the built space, took place with the French Revolution. The resultant of this change was 'sensible passivity' of the body and its isolation from other bodies and built space. 'Sensible passivity' emerged in the eighteenth century and became the main feature of our age. The body is too comfortable; it no longer knows what pain is.⁴

With this lost contact with pain, the body lost its contact with the real experience of the environment. With a loss of contact with physical reality, space became intangible. It was abstracted and isolated from reality. Isolation became more pronounced with the emergence of the megalopolis. Can such a process be recognized on a small scale city such as Valletta, a Capital with a few thousand inhabitants?⁵ The following is an attempt to construct an interpretive theme/theory based on sexuality, labour, bodily metaphor in planning, population density and

1. This paper, unedited, was read in 1995 at a research seminar on The Representations of Cities at The Bartlett, University College London. The author would like to acknowledge the constant and consistent support of Professor Denis De Lucca, former Dean of the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering and currently Head of the Department of Architecture and Urban Design and Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta.
2. Lino Bianco lectures and supervises research in modern architectural history and theory at the Department of Architecture and Urban Design, Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta.
3. R. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* New York 1994, 15.
4. Sennett distinguished between comfort as 'an effort to rest bodies fatigued by labour' and 'individual comfort'. He noted that the latter could easily serve "the person at rest in withdrawing from other people" *Ibid.* 338-9.
5. The whole of Malta, with a population of approximately 370,000, can hardly classify as a provincial city at the European level.

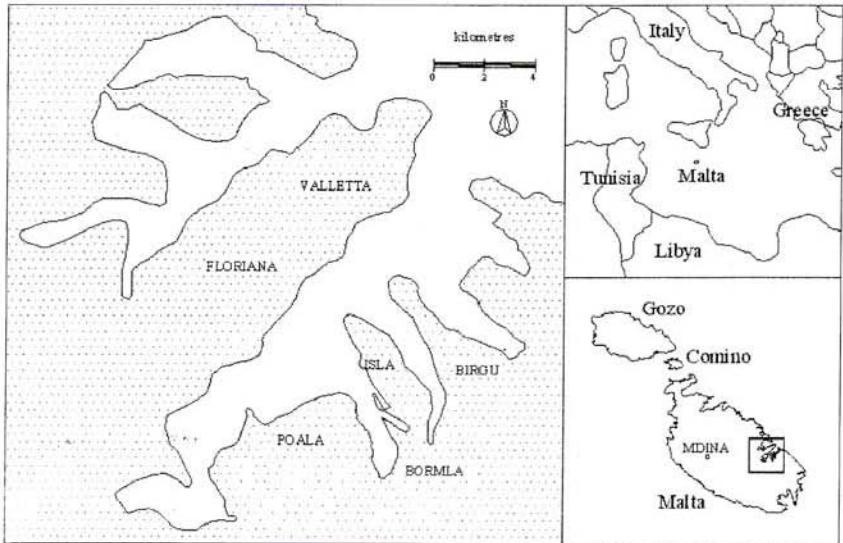


Figure 1: Site location plan of the city of Valletta

social encounters in Valletta founded over four centuries ago by the Sovereign Military and Hospitalier Order of Saint John, the Hierosolymitan Order of Malta, the forerunner of the Red Cross.⁶ The Order was given tenure of Malta by the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V in 1530 after Rhodes, their base since 1310, was captured by the Ottoman Empire in 1522. The Order reluctantly came to Malta, “the finest heap of rock in the World” in George Bernard Shaw’s words.⁷ Being a sea faring power, it established Birgu as its administrative base rather than Mdina, then the capital city (see insert in Figure 1).

6. Breycha-Vauthier and Potulicki argued that, given the motto of the Order of the Saint John for many centuries was ‘infirmes et infirmas benigne recipere’, the said Order can be regarded as the forerunner of the Red Cross (A.C. Breycha-Vauthier and M. Potulicki, ‘The Order of St. John in International Law: A Forerunner of the Red Cross’ in *American Society of International Law*, 1954, 554-563).
7. At the time the Order was organized into the following seven ‘tongues’ (or ‘langues’): Provence, Auvergne, France, Spain, Italy, England, and Germany. The Spanish ‘tongue’ was later divided into two, the Aragon and Castile-León, thus creating eight ‘tongues’ in total. Each ‘tongue’ had specific responsibility in the administrative and military running of the Order and resided in an auberge usually established in close proximity to the areas/tasks in the management of the city.

Conception and birth

Work on the building of Valletta commenced in early 1566, a few months after the end on the Great Siege of Malta whereby the Turkish armada was repelled from the Maltese shores, 'undoubtedly a propaganda victory' for the Order.⁸ The idea for a new city was conceived by the Grand Master who led the Island against the Ottoman attack, Fra Jean Parisot de la Valette, after whom the city took its name.⁹ The architect and military engineer entrusted with the task of planning the city and designing its fortifications was Francesco Laparelli, an architect in the service of the Vatican.¹⁰

In the year following the Great Siege of Malta which had 'humbled the pride of the Ottomans' and perhaps saved Christendom from the yoke of Islam, three men, namely La Valette, Laparelli and Girolamo Cassar, realised a vision of a new, fortified city; a city worthy of the ancient, aristocratic and Christian ideals of the religious and military Order whose 'Convent' was to sustain within defences which were to be impregnable.¹¹

The site for the city was the Scheb-er-ras peninsula, a bleak, barren, rocky promontory 42 metres above sea level. "The 'developers' ... were people of a

8. Q. Hughes, 'Give Me Time and I Give You Life: Francesco Laparelli and the Building of Valletta, Malta, 1565-1569' in *The Town Planning Review*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (Jan., 1978), 61-74. Although the foundation stone of Valletta was laid down on 28th March 1566, allegedly on the site where the Church of Our Lady of Victories now stands, the building of the city effectively commenced in the 1570s soon after Laparelli's layout was established (Ellul, M., 'Francesco Laparelli da Cortona and the Fortifications of Valletta', *Atti del XV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura*, Rome 1970).

9. Fra Jean Parisot de la Valette, French by birth, was Grand Master of Malta for the period 1557 and 1568.

10. Francesco Laparelli (b.1521 - d.1570), an Italian from Cortona, worked for Duke Casino I and Pope Pius IV. He worked on the defences of Civita Vecchia and Rome, and assisted Michelangelo Buonarroti in the building of St. Peter's (Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta*, London 1956, 217-8). On pleading to the Vatican for services of an architect specialized in planning and fortification design, Pius IV sent Laparelli for the service of the Order. In Michelangelo's words, in all his life Laparelli 'studied fortifications with more passion than sculpture and painting' (*ibid.* 218). After Laparelli's death, his former Maltese student architect Girolamo Cassar (b.1520-d.1586) carried on with the work. Vide Hughes, 'Give Me Time and I Give You Life'.

11. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, Malta 1985, 216.

particular kind who by their chosen vocation in life were concerned with both civil and military matters".¹² The latter was the main criterion for the selection of the site. In contemporary literature on military warfare design at the time, the site was considered very suitable for effective defence.¹³ The Vitruvian ideal for a site suitable for a new city was a plateau rather than a fertile land.

Valletta was not just designed as a fortress; it was designed to cater not only for the military but also for the Convent and other civilians. It was not designed as a fort but as a fortified city. It needed to be able to offer refuge to inhabitants of the island of Malta in the case of another siege. The topography of Valletta is illustrated through Figure 2.

In fear of another attack, grounded more in paranoia, fortifications were built first. In a correspondence addressed to the Duke of Anjou, La Valette wrote that 'news that we receive from day to day from a good source warns us that the Turks are organizing a very powerful force with the intention of besieging us again next spring because, after what has passed, we are still weak'.¹⁴ The general layout of the rectangular street pattern was decided at an early stage of the design of the city: twelve streets in length and nine in breadth. The original Lapparelli grid plan was accepted and it was approximately followed in the layout of the various building blocks. The sizes of the blocks differed from the original to suit the levels of the site.¹⁵ Furthermore, provisions were made by the Valletta Commission for open spaces, absent in Lapparelli's plan.¹⁶ Figure 2 illustrates the division of the city layout in various blocks which still regulates contemporary Valletta.

The work on the fortifications was nearly completed by 1573 following heavy financial assistance sought from all over Europe and five years of hard manual

12. *Ibid.* 31.

13. Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta*, 23. In a footnote Hughes refers to Nicolò Machiavelli *L'Arte della Guerra*, VII.1 and Porroni II, v 'De siti in peninsula, e suoi vantaggi ...' as then contemporary writers on fortifications (*ibid.* 23n).

14. Letter, dated (3rd?) November 1567, from Grand Master Jean Parisot de la Valette to the Duke of Anjou, brother of the King of France. This correspondence is available at the Library of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem (St. John's Gate, London, Clerkenwell K2 16M) and reproduced in R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 232.

15. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 121. The sizes of the various blocks in Lapparelli's drawings varied between 96m x 90m, to 45m x 96m and to 45m x 48m while those approved by the Valletta Commission differed substantially from one another (*ibid.* 121).

16. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 121.

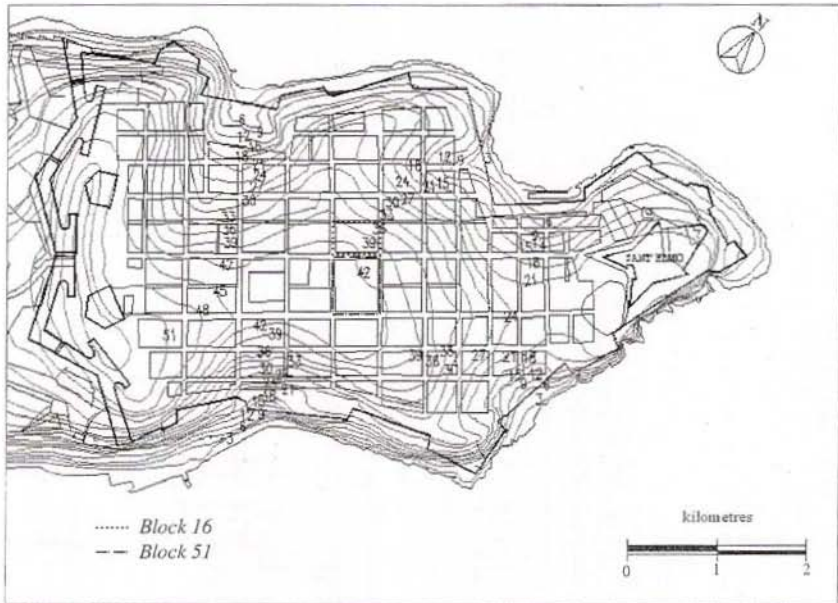


Figure 2: The topography and the grid layout of Valletta (contours are in metres)

labour to build the city's fortifications running over three kilometres in length.¹⁷ By 1570, besides fortifications, only a few houses and some other constructions were erected on the peninsula.¹⁸ Buildings in the new city were considered in

17. *Ibid.* 129.

18. B. dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di San Giovanni Gerosolomitano, detto di Malta* (Verona 1703), Vol. I, 5 referred to by De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 127. Also, vide map in Georg Braun and Franz Hogenberg, *Civitates Orbis Terrarum*, Cologne 1572, Vol. I. An almost identical map was produced by Henry de Beauvau (*M Relation journalière du voyage du levant fait & décrit par haut et puissant Seigneur Henry de Beauvau, Baron du dict lieu et de Manonville, Seigneur de Fleuille, Sermaise, Domepure etc., Nancy, 1615*).

Civitates Orbis Terrarum is a city atlas enclosing 546 prospects, bird-eye views and map views of cities from all over the globe at the time. The first volume was issued in 1572 whilst the sixth and the final volume was issued in 1617. It was mainly edited by Braun. He was assisted by Abraham Ortelius, the editor of *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* published in 1570, the first orderly and comprehensive compilation of maps in consistent style. Most of the plates included in both the *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* and the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* were engraved by Hogenberg (1535-1590). The *Civitates Orbis Terrarum* provided an outstandingly ample view of urban life at the turn of the sixteenth century.

relation with other buildings in the street and other public spaces. This way of perceiving town planning was in line with the contemporary Renaissance idea on the Continent of re-discovering and re-evaluating urban design. There was growing awareness of the importance that buildings have in composing streetscapes and defining public spaces.¹⁹

Social life

'Spatial relations of human bodies ... make a great deal of difference in how people react to each other, how they see and hear one another, whether they touch or are distant'.²⁰ Despite the Great Siege and plague epidemics, during the stay of the Order on the Island, population grew at an unprecedented rate from nearly 15,000 in 1530 to 114,000 in 1798.²¹ The variation of population at various instances during this period is illustrated by Figure 3.²² The slave population in Malta, at any given time, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was circa 2,000.²³

Twelve planning regulations controlling sanitary and aesthetic matters were issued by the Valletta Commission, known as *Officium Commissariorum Domorum*. The regulations stated that "This new city shall be divided into two

19. E. Guidoni and A. Marino, *Storia dell'Urbanistica*, Rome 1979.

20. Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*, 17.

21. The Order governed the Maltese archipelago from 1530 until 1798 when the Islands were occupied by Napoleon through the assistance of French members of the Order.

22. This figure is based on data supplied by J. Murray 'The Maltese Islands with Special Reference to their Geological Structure', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. 6 (1890), 457, and cited in Hughes, *The Building of Malta*, 4.

Despite these epidemics and a high infant mortality rate, the local population remarkably increased over the period from the late seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century. Furthermore, rather than increased emigration, this period is characterised by a sizeable number of foreigners living in Malta besides members of the Order. These included merchants, mercenary soldiers, sailors, galley convicts and slaves.

23. Two out of five slaves were Moors, the remainder being Turks, Africans and Jews. The slaves were involved in various assignments ranging from building construction and shipbuilding to the transportation of Knights and nobles by sedan-chair. Occasionally they were allowed to get involved in their respective trade(s) such as shoe-making, woodcarving and hairdressing.

In 1653 Inquisitor Federico Borromeo reported that slaves "strolled along the street of Valletta under the pretext of selling merchandise, spreading among the women and simple-minded persons any kind of superstition, charms, love-remedies and other similar vanities (A. Bonnici, 'Superstitions in Malta towards the middle of the Seventeenth Century in the Light of the Inquisition Trials,' in *Melita Historica*, Vol. 4, No. 3, 1966, 156-7).

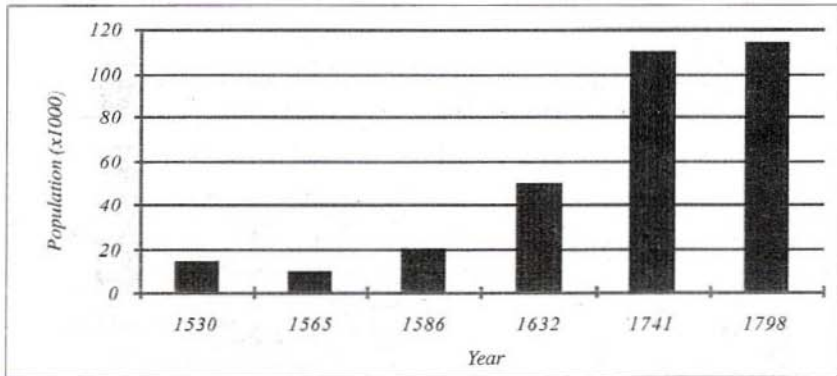


Figure 3. Variation in Population (based on Murray, 1890)

areas, the first, known as the Collachio, to be reserved for the residence of the Religious of the Order and the other, outside the Collachio, for that of the general public, both of which shall conform with the following conditions, the right, however, being reserved to locate within the Collachio other buildings as may be required by the Religion, such as the Church, the Infirmary, the Grand Master's residence, the Treasury, the Chancellery, the Bakery, the Arsenal, as well as other public building".²⁴ Despite these regulations, the idea of the Collachio

24. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 115. A summary of these conditions as recorded in the Archives of the Order (Liber Conciliorum MS. 92 f. 133) is reproduced in De Giorgio, 115-7.

The Collachio was the segregated part of the city where the members of the Order resided (Auberges), worked (the Infirmary), and prayed (the Conventual Church). The Castellania, the administration, was also located in the Collachio (De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 119, n.26).

The Officium Commissariorum Domorum introduced these regulations on 12 May 1569, "to control all non-military fortifications of Valletta" (Sammur, E., "Officio Delle Case e Regolamenti per la Fabbrica della Valletta", *Atti del XV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura*, Roma 1970). The first regulation related to the establishment of a 'Rhodian type collachio for the exclusive use by the Order', a concept abandoned on grounds of feasibility given that different auberges had to be in close proximity to the responsibilities related to the defence infrastructure. The other regulations were essentially enforced and account for much of the present historic urban design and building fabric. A résumé of these Regulations as recorded in the Archives of the Order (Liber Conciliorum MS. 92f, 133) is reproduced in De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 115-116; for a concise discussion on same, vide De Lucca, 'The Architecture of Valletta', *Atrium*, 6 [1983], 13-20. In this publication De Lucca addresses the pertinent question whether one can "isolate the formative factors which were ultimately responsible for the unique architectural character of Valletta".

was abandoned.²⁵ The residence of each *langue* was dispersed throughout the whole city. Each *Auberge* was built close to the area for which the respective *langue* was responsible.²⁶

Segregation between members of the Order and the remaining society was a distinguishing character of this religious order. Members had to be celibate and any contact with women was a criminal offence. Although sexual promiscuity was officially forbidden in society as a whole and among members of the Order in particular, homes for abandoned children and for children of unwedded mothers were built within a decade of the foundation of the city.²⁷ Mention is also made in the early seventeenth century of a convent intended to house the daughters of unwedded mothers.²⁸ Furthermore, towards the middle of the seventeenth century, works commenced on the *Ospedale delle Donne Incurabili*. Most women who needed hospitalization were street walkers. Such women were usually housed and paid an allowance as long as they were ill, an unendorsed provision catering for the sexual promiscuity among a number of members of the Order.²⁹

The monumental architecture of the Order of St John is essentially the labour of their subjects especially slaves. By late 1574, the Chapter General decided, among other things, to build new prisons because the existing ones were hardly habitable and hence marked the end of the practice of drowning prisoners alive.³⁰ De Giorgio suggests that the old prisons were likely to be uninhabitable due to overcrowding.³¹ In this religio-political system of power, the body was controlled and repressed. It was a means to an end. Prohibition and/or punishment, rather than control and transformation of subjects, was the rule. Power proceeded from a visible, identifiable, well-defined centre. A prison was an institution through which such power was communicated and legitimized. It was a center of control.

25. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 119, n.26.

26. Q. Hughes, *The Building of Malta*, 28.

27. R. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 173.

28. *Ibid.* 175.

29. *Ibid.* 210 and 215 (n.1). His main source was dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di San Giovanni Gerosolomitano, detto di Malta*, 273.

30. B. dal Pozzo, *Historia della Sacra Religione Militare di San Giovanni Gerosolomitano, detto di Malta*, 99 as cited by De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 172.

31. *Ibid.* 172.

By the first part of the seventeenth century, the urban development of Valletta was almost complete, a statement supported by a map of Valletta of Henry Raignauld.³² After 1650, following an increased birth rate, various zones of the city degenerated into a large slum. Building developments within the city in the second half of the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century were essentially embellishment works to the existing building fabric erected prior to 1650.³³ The panoramic views of the port of Valletta produced by Joseph Groupy,³⁴ dated early eighteenth century, compliments this claim as it corroborates with the 1643 map of Raignauld referred to earlier. The remaining, undeveloped block which was built in the late eighteenth century, was the site where the National Library is located, namely, the square between the Conventual Church and the Grand Master's Palace. This site was developed at the turn of the nineteenth century;³⁵ its absence is evident in a hand-coloured, highly detailed map of late eighteenth century Valletta.³⁶

Between 1631 and 1776, the General Chapter of the Order met only once; the Grand Master was becoming more of a tyrant, his powers subject only to the authority of the Pope. Still the Order was efficient in managing its affairs to cater for the needs of the population. An astonishing increase in the population forced the Order in the seventeenth century to increase food supply. Uncultivated land was restored and rendered agrarian produce. Irrigation and drainage infrastructure were also introduced. Despite the constant increase in the population, by the eighteenth century, the agricultural and cotton industries flourished to an extent that exports of cotton, principally to Marseilles and Barcelona, generated more revenue to the local economy than the finances of the Order. During the rule of Grand Master Nicholas Cottoner (1663-80), the main ward of the Sacra Infermeria, the main hospital of the Order in Valletta since 1574, was extended to measure circa 150 metres in length. In 1676, a

32. H. Raignauld, *Valletta Città Nova di Malta*, 1643.

33. D. De Lucca, 'The Architecture of Valletta', 14-15.

34. Vide Joseph Groupy's panoramic views entitled "*Veduta della Città di Malta dalla Parte del Lazaretto*", *Veduta della Città di Malta dalla Parte dei Gesuiti and Veduta del Porto dell' Entrata e della Città di Malta*, early XVIII century.

35. J. Stockdale, *A Plan of the City of Malta*, London, 1800; J. Luffman, *Select Plans of the Principal Cities, Harbours, Forts etc. in the World*, London, 1799-1802, Vol. II, Map 7.

36. *La Città della Valetta nell'Isola di Malta*, Italian, late eighteenth century.

school of anatomy and surgery was set up in the building as it developed into one of the finest infirmaries in Europe at the time.³⁷ Although the infirmary catered for male patients, segregation was also present. The main ward provided for knights, soldiers, sailors and foreigners. Maltese patients and slaves were lodged in another hall below the main ward. Besides trade and finances and the extension of the main hospital, the Order kept to its programme, occasionally supported through the private funds of members of the Order, to equip the city with public buildings fitting for a European city. Such buildings included a theatre, library and an university, institutions, all founded in a span of five decades in the middle part of the eighteenth century.

The eighteenth century was a period of significant social turmoil for Valletta ending with the capitulation of Malta to the French in 1798 and the advent of the British in 1800; indeed a century which saw the Island moving from being a protectorate of the Kingdom of Naples to a protectorate of the Kingdom of Great Britain except for a brief interval under the French Republic. Two thirds of the economy of Malta of this century depended on French trade. Public debts were running high especially in the latter part of the century.³⁸ Compared to contemporary European cities of the time, the quality of urban life in the higher strata of society in Malta had a certain degree of sophistication whilst many locals, on average, had a similar standard of living. Foreigners visiting Valletta noted large numbers of street beggars and prostitution.

The politico-economic situation in Malta became unbearable in the latter part of the eighteenth century. The influence of the French Revolution affected the island, a main port along the French eastern Mediterranean trade route. At the same time the rule of the Order opted for more despotic and totalitarian over centralized control.³⁹ The 1782 Code de Rohan is a proof of the Grand Master's arbitrary power, which the few professionals on the island grew to

37. Fra Dr Giuseppe Zammit, appointed 'lettore' in Anatomy and Surgery at the medical school in 1676, established the first medical library on the island as well as a medicinal herb garden in one of the ditches of Fort St Elmo.

38. In 1775, high debts and high grain prices due to poor harvest in Sicily had instigated a small, unorganized group from the lower hierarchy of the Church to lead a revolt against the Order which revolt miserably failed.

39. During this period, besides having a small navy and an arsenal, the Order had a work force of circa 2000 slaves.

resent, the rest of the population being mainly illiterate and submissive.⁴⁰ The enlightenment movement and the Revolution also bore its toll on the Order. The hostility of the newly established French Republic led to the confiscation of the bulk of the Order's wealth by 1792 and, eventually to the loss of its territorial sovereignty by 1798.⁴¹ The Order departed from Malta but during their stay, they transformed the site of Valletta from a barren rock to a cosmopolitan city, an administrative and a cultural centre with magnificent Auberges, palaces, a hospital, an university,⁴² a public library⁴³ and a public theatre.⁴⁴ Birgu, Isla and Bormla (Figure 1), better known as The Three Cities, were its industrial suburbs.

Slavery was abolished with the advent of Napoleon in 1798. An institution which was also eradicated soon after the arrival of the French, was the university. The latter was reinstituted by Captain, later Sir, Alexander Ball a few weeks

40. The nobility was loyal to the Order and often high public offices, as in the case of ecclesiastical offices, were occupied by nobles.

The *Code de Rohan*, a constitutional law book published in two volumes entitled *Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes of Malta*, was published in 1782. It was introduced by Grand Master De Rohan. A revised edition of the Code appeared shortly before his death in 1797.

41. The Orders of the Holy Spirit, Saint Michel and Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Lazarus were abolished by the post Revolution French Administration in 1790 and 1791. Following a speech by Deputy J.C. Vincens in 1792 on the finances of the Order at the French Assembly, the estates of the said Order were confiscated. Attempts were made to lift this state of affairs but they ran futile with the 1793 manifesto, falsely circulated in the name of the Grand Master. This fraudulent manifesto did not only place the Order at odds with the French Republic, but provided an excuse for the Directory to embark upon its plan to seize Malta under the pretext of hostility of the Order to the Republic.

Not all the knights agreed to the surrender of Malta to the French. This disagreement eventually led to the removal of Grand Master Ferdinand von Hompesch from Grand Master a few years after the Order departed from the Island. The removal of the Grand Master was the first in the Hierosolymitan Order who once appointed, served for life.

42. The University of Malta was founded in 1769. Its origins dates back to the foundation of the Collegium Melitense, set up through papal intervention on 12 November 1592, and was run by the Jesuit Order as a 'Collegia Externorum', thus catering for non-Jesuit students. The Jesuit Order was expelled from Malta in 1768 and, through monies derived from its estate, the Order aimed at setting up a 'Pubblica Università di Studi Generali'.
43. The Public Library was established in 1761.
44. The public theatre, nowadays known as the Manoel Theatre after Grand Master António Manoel de Vilhena. He commissioned and funded its construction in 1731 to serve "ad honestam populi oblectationem", the motto inscribed on its main entrance, meaning "for the honest recreation of the people".

after the departure of the French from the Island⁴⁵ whilst the former was not introduced due to other implications mostly diplomatic in nature. In 1799, the National Congress composed of representatives from the main towns and villages on the Island, presided by Ball, petitioned the King of Naples, the legitimate sovereign of the islands, to transfer his sovereign rights over the islands to the King of Great Britain. The petition was acceded to by King Ferdinand IV of Naples and thus his sovereign rights were transferred to King George III hence Britain became the Protectorate over Malta. This status was repelled in 1813 when Malta was assigned the role of a fortress-colony by Britain, a move which betrayed the pro-British Maltese patriots.⁴⁶

The British found new uses for some public buildings in Valletta. Auberges were transformed into offices linked to the Crown whilst the public library, the public theatre and other buildings catered for public utility retained their use, although occasionally modified to cater for the needs of the British. Renamed 'Station Hospital', the *Sacra Infermeria* kept on operating as a hospital until the end of the First World War. The British introduced the Neoclassical style in Malta soon after their arrival, evident in several palaces and other edifices, whether public schools or hospitals, built during this period. Valletta is not an exception. Indeed the first Greek revival portico is the one at the main guard whilst two new edifices erected in this style in Valletta are St Paul's Anglican Cathedral and the Royal Opera House. Other buildings erected in Valletta include Palazzo Ferreria, erected on the site of the former foundry of the Order in the late nineteenth century.

Malta's importance as a supply station and as a naval base increased throughout the nineteenth century, in particular in the later part, following the opening of the Suez Canal. This increased prosperity brought about by this development was to the benefit of a faction of the local population. Over the period from the mid-nineteenth century to the beginning of the First World War, Malta

45. To acknowledge his services throughout the rebellion against the French, Ball appointed Reverend Canon F.X. Caruana as rector of the re-established university.

46. These Maltese expected the Island to retain the status of a British Protectorate, a move which could not be challenged because the other leading powers in Europe at the time, meeting in Vienna, had assigned Malta to Britain. Military governors, with unlimited powers and answerable only to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, replaced the Civil Commissioners from 1813 onwards.

experienced a dramatic increase of 70% in its population. Although the Island was experiencing rapid urbanisation as town planning schemes for existing and new towns were being projected by the British, the majority of the population resided in Valletta and the Three Cities. Poverty was rampant as was cholera.⁴⁷ Parts of Valletta became associated with poverty and related crime. Till the arrival of the British, Strait Street, the notorious red light district of 19th and 20th century Malta, was a typical residential area. It was the birth place of the saintly clergyman and lawyer Nazju Falzon, a son of a judge. He resided and affected most of his pastoral work for several years in this street until the groups visiting him grew so large that he had to move out to another residence in another part of the city.

Great urban transformation occurred during the Second World War all over Malta. Inhabitants moved away from the harbour areas, namely Valletta and Cottonera, and the various airports to find shelter into towns and villages which were away from sites of military importance and thus less of a target to Luftwaffe which were concentrated in Sicily, 93 kilometres north of Malta. In this context, Valletta was not spared especially due to its Grand Harbour and its dockyards – a haven for the Allies Mediterranean fleet. In the post-war years up to recent times the human geography of the city experienced a steady decline in population. Most of the middle and upper middle classes moved away from the city to live in newly emerging suburbs and towns. In Sennett's language, the population shifted from the densely packed town centres to thinner, more amorphous space. The car made this even more possible. Due to its physical geography, human settlement in Valletta could not extend to its peripheral space but was forced to move into other towns. The exodus of higher social classes away from the city led to a greater proportion of lower, semi-illiterate people living in the city. They were mainly concentrated in slum areas, some of which were centuries old. The property, originally inhabited by the well-off, was sold or rented out as office space, initially at a very low price.

Traditionally three main suburban meeting places could be identified. These were the church square, the city square and the theatres. There are five parishes

47. In the mid-1830s, 2,500 beggars were reported in the villages alone (V. Mallia-Milanes, *The British Colonial Experience, 1800-1964: The Impact on Maltese Society*, Malta 1988, 181n).

in Valletta. Only the Conventual Church has a square in front. Notarial acts dating back to 1576 state that two thirds of the block in front of the Grand Master's Palace were designated as a public open space.⁴⁸ This space was and still is the principal square of the city. Where present, squares still function somehow as a meeting place. The city squares used to provide a good walk usually ending in theatre, or later, cinema going. With the advent of the car, in particular during the last two decades, the city squares became the main parking areas.⁴⁹ The site of the Royal Opera House, destroyed during Axis bombing, provided an official, informal, parking space.⁵⁰ The principal square of the city, the venue of military parades on state occasions, is officially used as a carpark. Other theatres were converted into cinemas in the 1950's. Most of them have, in turn, closed down in the 1980's and subsequently converted into shopping arcades. With the dawn of videos and highly sophisticated films, people prefer home entertainment rather than going to the cinema.

Biological life and chemical death

The entire city is considered by UNESCO as one single monument, a site of outstanding heritage importance for the enjoyment of posterity.⁵¹ During his visit to Valletta in August 1830, Benjamin Disraeli (b.1804-d.1881) remarked that the city "equals in its noble architecture, if it even does not excel, any capital of Europe".⁵² This cultural designation, coupled with transport infrastructural requirements, led planning authorities to reconsider and rehabilitate the city. The main streets, especially at the core, house government and business offices.

48. De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 143, n.6. The Grand Master's Palace occupies the entire area of block 5 (see Figure 2). The main entrance overlooks Strada San Giorgio, known as Kingsway during the British era and presently Republic Street, and thus the Notarial acts cited refer to block 16.
49. On the Island, the average proportion of cars to inhabitants is nearly one to three.
50. The Royal Opera House, on Republic Street, was designed by Edward Middleton Barry (b.1830 – d.1880), the son of Sir Charles Middleton Barry (b.1795 – d.1860), the architect of the present Palace of Westminster and Houses of Parliament. The erection of the opera house commenced in 1862 and was completed in 1866.
51. Valletta is a site of World Heritage significance. Outstanding buildings and monuments within the city include the Grand Master's Palace, the Co-Cathedral and Conventual Church of St. John, the remaining Auberges of the Knights and the Sacra Infermeria.
52. Disraeli visited Valletta on the recommendation of his friend, Lord Byron (b.1788-d.1824). He passed away on the same day, fifty seven years later, that Lord Byron died.

Schools and housing apartments, the centres of residential communities, are located along the edges of the city. The perimeter track is the ring road which directs traffic around, thus sealing off the city. Officially, except for the residents of Valletta, cars passing through this ring road do not need a special police licence as others going through the city.⁵³ Vehicular traffic through the city is thus discouraged. Originally conceived as a traffic impact measure, this measure had bearing on the air quality and served in reducing the chemical weathering of the building fabric.

Large efforts are being made to restore and conserve the architecture of buildings and streetscapes. Rehabilitation of unused or uninhabited property is an attempt to give soul and life to some of the buildings. The Auberges which are still standing, have been effectively used for other purposes.⁵⁴ Brothels in Strait Street, the most popular street in nineteenth and twentieth century Malta for prostitution, were converted into offices mainly for lawyers and notaries. Indeed, the extension of the Law Courts replaced some of the tenements in Strait Street.⁵⁵ Commerce, and allied criminal activity, gradually diminished with the run-down and eventually closing down of the British base in Malta. Brothels catered for sailors and officials stationed in the Grand Harbour and other servicemen associated with the air force and the army, the market which they addressed.

The city is the official seat of Government and a main administrative and business centre of the Island. It is corpse and stone after office hours and on weekends. It is haunting to walk through straight streets in pitch silence. It actually becomes more haunting when one is aware of the memories of the various streets – sites of crime and punishment; the sites of murders, conspiracy and public punishment including torture. Some metres above street level there is a niche-like feature at the corner of one of the palaces embellishing the city along Merchant Street corner with St John's Street, as one walks in the direction of the Grand Harbour.

53. The special police licence which allows vehicles less than 1600cc to enter Valletta is 50% more expensive than standard car licences.

54. Two such Auberges are the Auberge de Provence and the Auberge d'Italie. They were converted to the National Museum of Archaeology and the General Post Office respectively.

55. Like the Grand Master's Palace, the new Law Courts are built on an entire block. The main elevation overlooks Republic Street, the main street of the city, and its back elevation overlooks Strait Street.

It is not a niche for a saint, typical of Roman Catholic Malta. It now seems to be some form of permanent decorative feature in line with the regulations of the *Officium Commissariorum Domorum* issued in 1569.⁵⁶ Yet it was not designed to be so. It was the place where the convict would have been incarcerated, imprisonment being the language which the three official powers championed.⁵⁷ Valletta was not just a city by an Order but it was a city for an Order. It was the soul of the nation for more than three and a half centuries. Now it is dead. The Valletta Rehabilitation Project has created a political agenda intended to give new life to the city. Experience shows that it only serves to keep the city biologically active but in fact it is chemically dead. Valletta is no longer flesh and stone; it is corpse and stone.

Resuscitation and the epitaph

The *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands* offers a recipe for the future role of Valletta. It is strongly linked with meeting demands relating to vehicular transport. It seeks to:⁵⁸

1. Improve transport through underground parking spaces;
2. Park all non-resident cars in public carparks;
3. Create jobs and householders through better utilization of existing buildings;
4. Promote cultural activities and cultural tourism;
5. Establish public gardens and other viewing areas along the fortifications including 'discretely located food, drink and other facilities';⁵⁹

56. Regulation No.7 stated that 'Owners of houses sited on corner plots shall undertake to set up some form of permanent decorative feature in such corners, failure to comply with which shall entail the demolition of the house at the expense of the owner' (De Giorgio, *A City by an Order*, 116).

57. The main powers on the Island were the Order, the Church, and the Inquisition, each respectively headed by a non native. These powers, especially the Order and the Inquisition, could hardly see eye to eye. Actually, only palaces and other official buildings related to the respective duties of the Order and Church were built in Valletta. The new seat for both was Valletta. The Inquisitor's palace was not built in the new city. The seat of the Inquisition remained at Birgu.

58. Ministry for Development of Infrastructure, *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands: Explanatory Memorandum* (Malta 1990), 94, para. 15.7.

59. *Ibid.* 94, para. 15.7.7.

6. Maintain the grid iron plan of the city in order to provide scenic views and allow the streets to breathe the incoming breeze from the sea. Encourage design of new public spaces and bridges over the streets;
7. Improve taste of the overall cultural character of the city, repair and embellish fortifications, preserve monuments and their settings and 'create development opportunities within the city to house new uses and activities';⁶⁰ and
8. Add flavour and ensure Valletta to remain as the Capital, remove all governmental departments to a new complex just outside the city except for ministerial buildings.

The *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands* as a whole was conceived as an electric shock to the bizarre urban turmoil which commenced with the building boom of the 1960s and continued through the 70s to the 80s. Its objective was the entire Maltese archipelago. With respect to Valletta, the *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands* promotes the various life-restoring techniques highlighted above. These techniques are intended to resuscitate the city. It is widely acknowledged that the city has deteriorated both physically and socially in the last decades. The various techniques to resuscitate the city put forward were supplemented by the following six ways which aim to:⁶¹

1. Provide a civic focal space in front of the Grand Master's Palace to integrate the Conventual Church, the Law Courts and the seat of Government;
2. Redevelop Mattia Preti Square area by creating 'a maritime gateway with offices overlooking Marsamxett Harbour', and provide car parking facilities at a lower level;⁶²
3. Redesign City Gate⁶³ and Republic Square which lie just inside the gate;
4. Develop the site of the Opera House into a cultural centre;

60. *Ibid.*, para. 15.7.6(c).

61. *Ibid.* 94-6, para. 15.8.

62. *Ibid.* 96, para. 15.8.2.

63. The original city gate was designed by the Knights and was remodelled by the British. The present gate was designed in the 1960s. The former two were similar in scale while the last was enormously bigger. It had to cater for the fact that King Carnival had to go through during its three-day annual reign in February. Previously, King Carnival used to enter the city through a main street on the sides of the fortifications leading to Auberge de Castille.

5. Proliferate activities within Republic Street, the main artery, into other parts of the city; and
6. Design a new contextual building complex around a new public space to unite and improve the quality of the part of Republic Street where low income housing is situated.⁶⁴

These measures are intended to maintain motion and sensation. In this context one may argue for premature burial rather than claim that the city is corpse and stone. Such argument will encourage one to think that the city is drowning but not really dead. Artificial respiration as the one provided by the *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands*, undermines faith in diagnosing death but, at the same instant, it is widely held that the city is decomposing. This is a contradiction in terms. One may argue whether it is premature burial or not, certainly putrefaction is an indication of real death. Furthermore, to continue the analogy with resuscitation, one may equate the inflation of the lungs with the starting of the pendulum on a stopped clock but one cannot turn the clock back. The introductory paragraph of the *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands* related to the conservation of Valletta can be read as the epitaph: 'The Valletta Harbours Heritage Area can be considered as Malta's crown with Valletta as the jewel in the crown'.⁶⁵

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64. The quality of Republic Street deteriorates as one moves inwards from city gate to the harbour in particular from corner with Archbishop Street to Fort St Elmo.
65. *Structure Plan for the Maltese Islands*, 93, para. 15.5.